
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 601 **Hearing Date:** July 15, 2025
Author: Jackson
Version: April 10, 2025
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: SU

Subject: *Child abuse: reporting*

HISTORY

Source: Author

Prior Legislation: AB 1799 (Jackson), from committee without further action, 2024
AB 2468 (L. Rivas), not heard in Assembly Public Safety, 2024
AB 2085 (Holden), Ch. 770, Stats. of 2022

Support: American Academy of Pediatrics, California; California Alliance of Child and Family Services; California Family Resource Association; Child Abuse Prevention Center; Child Care Resource Center; County Welfare Directors Association of California; Prevent Child Abuse California; Safe Kids California

Opposition: Riverside County Sheriff's Office

Assembly Floor Vote: 79 - 0

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to, develop a standardized curriculum for mandated reporters by July 1, 2027 with the goals of adopting an alternative response approach to general neglect and reducing racial disparities in reporting and involvement in the child welfare system.

Existing law establishes the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA) and states that the intent and purpose of the Act is to protect children from abuse and neglect. (Pen. Code, § 11164.)

Existing law defines "child" under CANRA to mean person under the age of 18 years. (Pen. Code, § 11165.)

Existing law defines "child abuse or neglect" under CANRA to include physical injury or death inflicted by other than accidental means upon a child by another person, sexual abuse as defined, neglect as defined, the willful harming or injuring of a child or the endangering of the person or health of a child as defined, and unlawful corporal punishment or injury, as defined. (Pen. Code, § 11165.6.)

Existing law enumerates close to 50 categories of mandatory child abuse reporters. Specific occupations that are mandated reporters include, but are not limited to, teachers, athletic coaches, social workers, peace officers, firefighters, physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, emergency medical technicians, licensed family therapists, child visitation monitors, and clergy. (Pen. Code, § 11165.7, subd. (a).)

Existing law requires a mandated reporter to make a report to a specified agency whenever the mandated reporter, in their professional capacity or within the scope of their employment, has knowledge of or observes a child whom the mandated reporter knows or reasonably suspects has been the victim of child abuse or neglect to report that incident immediately to a specified child protection agency by telephone, and further requires a written report be sent within 36 hours. (Pen. Code, § 11166, subd. (a).)

Existing law requires mandated reporters, with the exception of child visitation monitors, prior to commencing their employment, and as a prerequisite to that employment, to sign a statement on to the effect that they have knowledge of the provisions in CANRA and will comply with those provisions. (Pen. Code, § 11166.5, subd. (a).)

Existing law requires specified employers to provide their employees who are mandated reporters with training in the duties imposed by CANRA. Requires this training to include training in child abuse and neglect identification and training in child abuse and neglect reporting. Authorizes the training requirement to be met by completing the general online training for mandated reporters offered by the Office of Child Abuse and Prevention (OCAP) in CDSS. (Pen. Code, § 11165.7, subd. (c)(2).)

Existing law requires school districts, county offices of education, state special schools and diagnostic centers operated by the California Department of Education (CDE), and charter schools to annually train their employees and persons working on their behalf in the duties of mandated reporters under the child abuse reporting laws. Requires the training to include training in child abuse and neglect identification and child abuse and neglect reporting. (Pen. Code, § 11165.7, subd. (d).)

Existing law strongly encourages employers who are not required to provide a training, to provide their employees who are mandated reporters with training in the duties imposed by CANRA. Requires this training to include training in child abuse and neglect identification and training in child abuse and neglect reporting. (Pen. Code, § 11165.7, subd. (c).)

Existing law strongly encourages volunteers of public or private organizations whose duties require direct contact with and supervision of children to obtain training in the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect, even though they are not mandated reporters. (Pen. Code, § 11165.7, subd. (b).)

Existing law requires an administrator, employee, or regular volunteer of a youth service organization to complete training in child abuse and neglect identification and training in child abuse and neglect reporting. Permits the training requirements to be met by completing the online mandated reporter training provided by OCAP in CDSS. (Bus. & Prof. Code, § 18975, subd. (a).)

Existing law requires CDSS, as part of the administration of child day care licensing, to provide training, including statewide guidance on the responsibilities of a mandated reporter who is a

licensed day care provider or an applicant for that license, administrator, or employee of a licensed child day care facility in accordance with CANRA. Requires CDSS to provide the guidance using its free module, or modules provided on the CDSS website, or as otherwise specified by the department. (Health & Saf. Code, § 1596.8662, subd. (a)(2).)

Existing law states that, unless otherwise specifically provided, the absence of training shall not excuse a mandated reporter from the duties imposed by the CANRA. (Pen. Code, § 11165.7, subd. (f).)

Existing law makes it a misdemeanor for a mandated reporter to fail to report an incident of known or reasonably suspected child abuse or neglect as required by the CANRA. The offense is punishable by up to six months confinement in a county jail, or by a fine of \$1,000, or by both. (Pen. Code, § 11166, subd. (c).)

This bill requires the OCAP, with participation from people with lived experience, county child welfare agencies, and other stakeholders to develop a standardized curriculum for mandated reporters no later than July 1, 2027. The curriculum shall contain specified components.

This bill requires CDSS to make the training available on its website.

This bill requires an employer having one or more mandated reporters to ensure completion of the training within the first three months of their employment, or on or before March 1, 2030, whichever is later. Completion of the training must be documented in a manner that would allow CDSS to verify completion upon request.

This bill exempts the following from this training requirement:

- Volunteers whose duties require direct contact with and supervision of children; and
- Any mandated reporter who is otherwise required by law to receive training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting.

This bill states that county child welfare services departments do not need to substantiate or have allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation in order to provide services and stabilization support.

This bill states that a county's written plan on providing prevention services shall include the county's plans to provide information for mandated reporters regarding the resources available to support families in their communities.

This bill requires the California Child Welfare Council, through its Prevention and Early Intervention Committee, to establish a Mandated Reporting Advisory Committee.

This bill states legislative intent to clarify statutes to allow for the sharing of information across agencies through a multidisciplinary team approach to serve children and families to prevent foster care entry.

This bill contains legislative findings and declarations highlighting that harm and trauma of unnecessary reporting of child abuse and neglect falls disproportionately on Black/African American and Native American/Indigenous and Hispanic children and that training on general neglect is needed to eliminate the disproportionate surveillance and reporting of these families.

COMMENTS

1. Need for This Bill

According to the author:

As the author of this bill, I am committed to strengthening California's child welfare system by fostering a balanced approach that supports families, promotes equity, and enhances child safety. Our current mandated reporting framework has led to an increase in reports, particularly for general neglect, and I believe we have an opportunity to refine this process to better serve our communities. To ensure consistency and understanding, this bill requires all mandated reporters to receive standardized training within their first three months of employment, equipping them with the tools to recognize needs, understand available resources, and make informed decisions.

2. Mandated Reporters:

California's mandated reporter statutes require that certain individuals who, in a professional capacity or within the scope of employment, have knowledge of or observe a child whom the mandated reporter knows or reasonably suspects has been the victim of child abuse or neglect to make an immediate report to a law enforcement agency, as specified. The statute defines what constitutes reasonable suspicion and lists 49 specific categories of employees that are defined as mandated reporters, including teachers, coaches, child care workers, social workers and probation officers, firefighters, specific medical personnel, commercial film and photographic image processors, and others. It requires that mandated reporters be trained about their responsibilities and duties to report, including specifying that the first report must be made by telephone and a subsequent written report must be made within 36 hours of receiving information about the incident. (Pen. Code, §§ 11165.7 & 11166.)

The statute specifies that the reporting duties are individual and states that no supervisor or administrator may impede or inhibit the reporting duties, and no person making a report shall be subject to any sanction for making the report. (Pen. Code, § 11166, subd. (i)(1).)

The penalty for a mandated reporter who fails to report an incident in a timely manner is up to six months in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000, or both. (Pen. Code, § 11166, subd. (c).) The punishment for a mandated reporter who either willfully fails to report or who impedes or inhibits a report of abuse or neglect – where the abuse or neglect results in the death or great bodily injury of a child – is up to one year in a county jail, or a fine of not more than \$5,000, or both. (Pen. Code, § 11166.01, subd. (b).)

3. Current Mandated Reporter Training

Currently, mandated reporter training is offered through the Child Abuse Mandated Reporter Training Project which is supported by CDSS and OCAP. The current training is voluntary and consists of online profession-specific courses designed to address the specific realities of different professionals and volunteers by providing training to identify and report suspected child abuse and neglect. Along with a general training for all mandated reporters, the website includes updated training for child care providers, medical professionals, law enforcement, mental health professionals, social workers, clergy, and volunteers. (See CDSS website,

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/ocap/mrt> [last visited July 7, 2025].) The general non-profession specific training, as well as the educator and child care provider training, is now available in Spanish. (<https://mandatedreporter.ca.com/training> [last visited July 7, 2025].)

This bill requires OCAP, with participation from people with lived experience, county child welfare agencies, and other stakeholders, to create standardized training on child abuse and neglect reporting. To address racial disparities in reporting of abuse and curriculum must include all of the following:

- The history of mandated reporting laws, including the impact of structural racism on disparities for Black and Indigenous families;
- The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act;
- California’s Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA);
- Best practice for defining “reasonable suspicion” and “substantial risk”;
- The differences between “severe” and “general” neglect as defined in existing law;
- California child abuse, neglect, and disproportionality data;
- The definitions of “bias,” including “implicit,” and “explicit,” bias, and “trauma,” the impact of bias and trauma on families and children, and strategies for recognizing and mitigating their impact;
- The impact on families of making a child abuse or neglect report to child protective services;
- Considerations for special populations, including individuals with disabilities, behavioral health, domestic violence, and substance use concerns, as well as the unique factors involved in supporting children 0 to 5 years of age;
- Decision-making processes and tools for mandated reporters; and,
- Education and information on community resources, community-based organizations, and other government agencies that can provide support to families in need.

This bill requires CDSS to make the training available on its website.

It should be noted, that some mandated reporters are statutorily required to complete their own training according to the requirements of their specific job and credentials. For example, teachers and law enforcement have specific requirements placed on their training as it relates to the time they need to complete their training, the frequency, and the content it is required to cover.

This bill would require all employers of mandated reporters to provide the training created under these provisions, within the first three months of their employment except for any mandated reporter who is otherwise required by law to receive training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting as well as volunteers whose duties require direct contact with and supervision of children but who are not mandated reporters.

4. Argument in Support

According to the California Alliance of Child and Family Services:

AB 601 confronts a critical challenge in child welfare today – the overuse and misuse of mandated reporting, especially in cases of general neglect that stem from poverty or lack of access to resources—not from abuse.

The current system too often conflates economic hardship with risk of harm, resulting in unnecessary investigations and trauma for families, especially those from Black, Indigenous, and Latine communities. According to the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP), in 2024 only 11.1% of reports were substantiated, while over 186,000 allegations were made for general neglect revealing a strained and inequitable system.

AB 601 introduces a much-needed course correction. It requires the Department of Social Services (DSS) to develop a standardized, equity-informed training for mandated reporters—grounded in history, bias recognition, trauma awareness, and knowledge of community resources. AB 601 empowers mandated reporters to support families rather than default to punitive reporting. By promoting early intervention and family preservation rather than removal, offering families community-based services instead of system involvement, children are more likely to remain safely at home—and thrive. The child welfare system must be reformed, including how we identify and respond to concerns in the first place. AB 601 is a critical step toward a system that prevents harm, promotes racial justice, and supports families, rather than separating them

5. Argument in Opposition

According to the Riverside County Sheriff's Office:

Law enforcement officers in California already receive mandated reporter training as part of the POST-certified academy curriculum. This includes a dedicated block of instruction specifically covering the legal obligation, responsibilities, and reporting protocols under California's mandated reporter laws. Additionally, these topics are reinforced during the Field Training Officer (FTO) program, which now spans nearly five months following a 6.5-month academy.

Requiring law enforcement personnel to complete separate mandated reporter training under AB 601 is redundant, unnecessary, and administratively burdensome. The training requirement, as drafted, fails to acknowledge the extensive training already being provided. For these reasons, we request a full exemption for law enforcement officers from the training requirement in AB 601.

– END –